

Families Torn Apart

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There is absolutely no doubt that a substantial number of European Jews would have survived, had not the Christian population in Poland, the Ukraine and Lithuania participated in their extermination. The German murderers would not have been able to carry it out in such a thorough way on their own.

The few survivors, who had seen with their own eyes the cruelty of their one time “neighbors and good friends”, are those who pass this judgment anxiously and with a broken heart. Their “good neighbors” had turned into relentless murderers overnight. In many places the civilian population behaved even more heinously than the German butchers. The locals lay in wait for Jewish children, dragged them out of their hiding places and handed them over to their death for the price of a bottle of Wodka or a pound of sugar.

This can also be corroborated by information received from Zamość.

George (Gerszon) Zussman (Zysman) (living in New York, Bronx 1627, Polton Avenue) received a letter from the young author **Mordechaj Sztrigler**, who escaped from Zamość and is living in France. This long letter describes the suffering of the Jews in Zamość, before death delivered them out of the hands of their tormentors. Zussman’s relatives were among the victims.

Here are some extracts from the letter:

“In 1942, on Passover Eve, a few thousand Jews were herded together and sent to a death camp, among them my parents and my sisters, **Golda** and **Riwka**. The streets were strewn with corpses. Shots were heard from all the houses. **Mordechaj**, his wife, his children and other relatives were driven to the marketplace and then immediately sent on— together with my family – to **Belzec**. The mother **Hila** was very weak and little **Shlojmel**, a boy of twelve, the son of **Abracham Iser**, took his mother on his back and carried her to the marketplace. His father happened to be in the yard at the time and didn’t know what happened inside the house. One of the Gestapo policemen found him and dragged him along with great cruelty. **Lejbusz**, your brother, hid in the attic and through a crack saw what happened below. When your father was beaten with a rubber truncheon, he came out of his hiding place, threw himself on the German sergeant and protecting his father with his body struck the German’s face with all his might. Both father and son were killed by other Gestapo policemen, standing a short distance away from the steps to your new house.

That night I ran about, totally confused. Early in the morning I got there and saw them lying side by side. Your father’s head was resting on **Lejbusz’s** body, riddled with **bullets**. **Abracham Iser stood next to me, frozen still. We broke down in tears.**

When those surrounded in the marketplace were rushed to the railway station, they opened fire on them and hundreds were killed. Your mother was among them. It was on 24th Nisan, 1942. You, the brothers, must commemorate that sacred date.

Aharele, **Abracham Iser**'s young son, a clever boy, hid inside straw in the villages. I and **Abracham Iser** hid in Karoluvka. Little **Aharele** used to come and tell us the news from the town. There were no Jews left in Zamość, except for a small camp with a few hundred people, who had bought the privilege of survival in blood.

One day the agricultural engineer, **Swacha**, a Pole and a close acquaintance of your family, discovered little **Aharele** and handed him over to the Gestapo for a bottle of Wodka. When **Abracham Iser** heard about his little son's fate, his grief was overwhelming.

A few weeks later we were also handed over to the Gestapo and it was just by chance that instead of executing us, they locked us up in the camp in the town. All the Jews who had used it as a refuge before us had been killed, so the Gestapo were now looking for a few Jews, to exploit their labor for a certain time. **Abracham Iser** was later with me until May 1944 in **Majdanek** and **Skarzysko**. The torture and starvation we experienced are inconceivable.

Abracham Iser happened to work on the night shift. One morning, when I saw he did not return, I understood that something had happened. I asked the Jewish police to find out what had happened to him, and after searching for him the whole day, they found him unconscious. It turned out that his Polish bosses had beaten him with sticks until he fainted. He was still alive when they brought him to the camp. I sat beside him day and night. For me he was a living memory of my whole family. I remembered my childhood. He regained consciousness and said that as long as I am beside him it all seems a lie and that all his family is still alive. Throughout our stay in the camp he had cared for me like a father for his son and shared with me the few bundles of straw that he had

managed to smuggle into the camp to “soften” our “bed” a little. He also shared with me the piece of paper we used to wrap round our bare feet in winter. He died in my arms.

Whenever I think of him, my instinct to avenge him erupts. Today those Polish bosses walk about free and incite others to murder Jews. The Polish language has become loathsome to me.

He was buried together with 7,000 Jews in a mass grave dug in a wood, next to the factory in Skarzysko-Kamienna . Later the Germans took all the corpses out of the mass graves in Skarzysko and burnt them.

Mendel, the son-in-law of your uncle, David Frampol, was with us in Skarzysko-Kamienna and together we said Kadish for Abracham Iser. Mendel, together with hundreds of Jews, was shot on the 9th of Av, 1944.

Elka Kramf's family, Brajna the milkmaid and her children, escaped from Lwow and lived with us in one room in the new town. They were later sent one by one to the death camp. Dobcza continued to fight for her life and also perished in the end. Chaim went into the forest to the Partisans. But who knows what happened to him? At that time, in 1942, the Polish Partisans were shooting all the Jews who came to join them. It was a miracle that they did not kill me. Mordechaj, Chayale's husband, whom I saw a few months before liberation, may have survived. My sister Lejtsza was sent from Warsaw to Majdanek and disappeared there. My sisters, Stasia, Faiga and Hancza were in Siberia, but I have no news of them. My sister Chawcze lived with her husband in Minsk and I don't know if she was able to escape from the murderers.

After all that I have seen I have no illusions to comfort me. I shall live the years left to me in deep sorrow and pain. I saw a whole nation wiped out. I only find comfort in activity promoting the rebirth of my nation."